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TRADE TEACHING UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE TYPOGRAPHICAL UNION

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A number of things—all commonplace enough in the industrial world—moved the International Typographical Union to establish trade or technical education as a feature of its work. Its long and fruitless agitation to preserve some semblance of a real apprenticeship system taught it that the education of apprentices was no longer possible in the average printing office. The shops were becoming specialized, and hence of necessity graduated specialists. For employing printers to say they would thoroughly “teach” a boy the trade was largely a figure of speech; with few exceptions they could not if they would, as they lacked the facilities. The boy would be turned over to a foreman or superintendent, who is always harassed with demands that he reduce the cost of production, and who in turn is ever urging those under him to greater effort or devising plans to meet the insistent demand for an increased output.

In these circumstances it is not surprising that the foreman’s chief desire is not to teach the boy the trade, but to discover how he can be used most profitably. If the boy shows special aptness for some simple operation, his “apprenticeship” too often consists in doing that one thing. If he acquires a general knowledge of the trade, it is as best he may by the rule of thumb, for woe betide the journeyman who puts on his time ticket “Thirty minutes consumed in showing Johnny the how and why on the Smith job.” If fortunate, this warm-hearted fellow would be warned that he was there to produce the goods and not to show others how to do it. If not so fortunate, and he persisted in taking a real interest in the boy at his side, he would be laid off because his ticket didn’t show the results desired. This system has been producing so-called specialists, and some are inclined to say it is all right in an age of specialists, as they point to this lawyer or that physician or financier who has had unbounded success by following a specialty in his profession.

They forget that the physician is first well-grounded in the principles and practice of medicine, and the attorney in the principles of law, before selecting their specialties. That general knowledge is of great assistance to them. The workman trained in the manner just described may be a specialist at his trade, but it is because that one operation is the extent of his knowledge of his vocation. In the highly specialized trades the dread dead line, or age limit, is placed at an early year, and precarious employment is the rule. Not being transferable from one class of work to another, this kind of "specialist" is the victim of the greatest blight that can come athwart a wage-earner's life—unsteady employment. While the old apprenticeship system was decaying the quality of the printed page was improving. The improvement is due in great measure to the influence of commercial artists who design work to the last detail, which the artisan copies with more or less fidelity. This precludes even the most capable compositors exercising their ingenuity or skill, thereby reducing them to the grade of mere copyists, which is fatal to the development of originality or mental growth.

Another motive that actuated the union to take up trade teaching was a desire to influence in some degree the use of the new-found leisure of its members. The strike incident to the establishment of the eight-hour workday had not ended when the organization appointed a commission to formulate some scheme whereby its members and apprentices could obtain a better knowledge of the trade than is possible in the offices. The commission organized last December. Its problem was to devise a plan of education that would be acceptable to the nearly 50,000 members of the International Typographical Union distributed among about 700 local unions. It must have an educational scheme with a message for the best printer in the metropolis as well as the tyro in the "jerkwater" town. It was at first suggested that something be done along the lines of university extension work and the establishment of plants for school purposes in printing centers. This scheme was rejected, partly on account of the great expense attached thereto and partly because some of those paying for the educational system and perhaps needing its assistance most—those residing in small towns or in remote districts—would not be able to take advantage of it.

The "Inland Printer," the craft's leading trade journal, had conducted a technical school a number of years under the auspices of

the union. It had been a success financially, but its promoters had long been dissatisfied with the character of instruction imparted. Following the lines of typographical education generally, its standard of excellence was a matter of personal taste. If one instructor said "This is a good job," and another dissented from that dictum, there might be many words and some heat, but no informing, enlightening information reached the students. Convinced that there must be reasons to justify good typography, the promoters of the Inland Printer School determined to ascertain what they were, and remedy the defect common to trade educational efforts. They went to the art schools and schools of design, and on investigation found that they were teaching the principles which are the basis of good typography. It might be mentioned parenthetically that some of the art school people scoffed at the idea that what they were teaching had aught to do with so common a thing as printing; that art could have aught to do with what they deemed purely mechanical operations was not comprehended by them. The Inland Printer School then began to teach craftsmanship scientifically—to expound the principles of design and of color harmony.

About the time the union's commission was appointed it had been suggested that this system of instruction could be reduced to a correspondence course. Satisfied that the instruction was what was needed, the commission saw its way out of the dilemma born of the necessity for reaching the poorest and most backward printer as well as the best-paid men working in finely-equipped offices. As a commercial venture this course of thirty-seven lessons would cost from \$50 to \$60, which would deter many from taking it. The commission was anxious that no taint of profit should attach to its scheme—that it should have but the one purpose of advancing the interests of the students.

To that end it proposed that the Inland Printer School sell the instruction for approximately cost price. The union on its part undertook to do all the advertising and to give a rebate of \$5 to each student who pursued the course to the end with ordinary diligence and intelligence. This was acceded to by the school company, and the price of the course was set at \$20, which includes outfit, etc., valued at \$5, and the right of a student to seek advice from the experts of the school on any technical problem that may arise while he remains at the trade. The union looks on this

as a contribution to trade efficiency, and the only restriction imposed is that students shall be compositors, the course being open to apprentice or journeyman, unionist or non-unionist. In this shape the scheme was presented to the craft. Many local unions supplemented the work of the International Union by incurring expense in promoting the course, and adding a bonus to the rebate granted by the parent organization, while some at present offer special inducements to apprentices within their jurisdiction. Though employers concede the undertaking to be a magnificent effort to meet a pressing need, few of them as yet have done anything to aid in spreading a knowledge of the course. This is especially noticeable in the case of some employers who are known for their loud lamentations about the dearth of capable workmen.

The system is known as the International Typographical Union Course in Printing, and six months after its inception has about 400 pupils enrolled, including some of the most expert craftsmen on this continent and a few from the British Isles and Australia. The unanimous verdict of the students is that the course possesses all the merit and value claimed for it. One who is known the world over for the excellence of his work and the quality of his essays on typography, declares it to be of the best and cheapest information he ever secured. Another student—the highest-paid compositor in his home city—says he learned more about some phases of craft work in two months than he had acquired in sixteen years in the office.

The methods of instruction pursued are responsible for this. The aim of the course is to teach the principles underlying good typography. On the theory that the real tools of the decorative printer are letters, the student is required to do freehand lettering. This has some commercial value, for there is a steadily growing demand for hand-lettering in high-class printing. These lessons are in the course for their cultural value, however. The best manner of knowing the beauty and forcefulness of letters is to make them. When the student has acquired that knowledge he finds it a great help in using letters most effectively, which is the object of his craft. Many compositors objected that they could not do what is technically known as lettering, as when at school they had never had an aptitude for drawing. They are told that lettering is not art but craftsmanship, and that any one who can write can learn

to letter. In this and other ways they are encouraged, and after perseverance they make progress at a rate that amazes them and at first astonished the instructors. The commission had the work of students examined critically by instructors of the Art Institute of Chicago. Their report was that the class of printers made more rapid and satisfactory progress than did art classes. This unexpected proficiency was ascribed to several causes. The most rational explanation is that printers, having been dealing with letters all their mature days had acquired a wealth of sub-conscious knowledge concerning them which flowered and found expression as soon as they became acquainted with the tools of the letterer. The course does not impart new wisdom so much as it shows students a way to use talents they already possess, but of the possession of which they are ignorant.

The same is true of the principles of design. The successful compositor has been expounding those principles unconsciously. The average worker at the case—the man who sometimes does exceedingly well and on other occasions fails miserably—gets on or off the track of true art principles by accident, and in his ignorance wonders why he cannot “hit it off” on every job. The course shows these men of varying degrees of native ability as well as those without any artistic sense the laws that govern good typography. After following the lessons they know thoroughly what is meant by proportion, shape, harmony, balance and measure. They not only learn how to do their work correctly but *why* it is correct. Seized of this information, the compositor reduces the cost of production materially and adds immeasurably to the art value of his product, which ultimately means more printing, better prices and higher wages.

At present the hand of the designer is seen in much printing. Usually he is an outsider who knows little of the limitations that beset the worker in type metal. Intent on developing the artistic side of his design, he in his ignorance often sets the compositor impossible problems to solve. This results in loss in rearranging the design or a botched job, which is wasteful and injurious to the craft. Where the designing and composition are co-ordinated in one person these wasteful conflicts are obviated. Where the worker has a thorough understanding of the design and a sympathy with it from beginning to end more desirable results are sure to be attained.

With even advanced and progressive compositors color harmony is often regarded as a matter of taste. The course treats this subject in a scientific manner, and at the conclusion of this group of lessons the student, besides absorbing much other information, has made a chart which is an accurate authority on the harmonies, contrasts and complements of all the colors used in printing.

After a thorough drilling in these underlying principles, students are required to expound them by actual work in all the principal varieties of display composition, such as title pages, letter-heads, business cards of all kinds, advertisements, etc., under the supervision of the instructors.

The new features in typographical education embraced in the course are what the art schools have which can be utilized by compositors. Though these lessons are written by printers for printers, and contain a valuable education in themselves, the great benefit of the course is derived from the advice and criticism of the instruction department. Under the arrangement between the Inland Printer School and the commission it is provided that the instruction department must be kept at the highest point of efficiency. Circumstances may compel an increase in the tuition fee or the union may be required to spend more money, but the instruction must be the best possible. In furtherance of this desire, an earnest effort is made to get close to the students. They are requested to keep pads at their elbows and jot down anything which seems to interfere with their progress as students or in the workroom. Any student forwarding one of these slips is sure of promptly receiving the best advice which the instructors can give. Each exercise sheet sent in by a student is gone over carefully and in detail by an instructor, who indicates the faults in a colored pencil. The sheet is then returned to the student, together with a letter of advice showing why the student was at fault and how to correct the blemish. No pains or expense are spared to help the backward student—he is the especial care of the commission. Illustrative of this, I cite the case of one “slow” student who received a letter which, if paid for at the rates ruling with the technical press would have cost \$10. The recipient thought it worth many times that amount.

The International Typographical Union is recognized among economists as the typical American labor organization. It has been included in the general denunciation of trade unions for being op-

posed to technical education. Frankly, it is opposed to many of the schemes being fostered under the cloak of trade education. It is opposed to educational efforts that are more intent on making money for their promoters than on benefiting the scholars. It is also opposed to schools that graduate inferior workmen, as its members know the fate of such unfortunates, and those who induce men to go into the industrial battle poorly equipped not merely wreck human lives but swell the ranks of criminals.

The typographical union also holds it to be folly to erect special machinery to entice men or boys to take up trades that are already overcrowded. The usual and natural avenues of the trade open the way for a sufficiency of beginners. Some employers want to see hosts of unemployed at all times, so that the grinding of the faces of the poor may be made easier. Of course the unions are opposed to that, as are all those who delight in seeing the relative standard of living of the masses maintained and improved. In short, the union contends—and it knows—that there is no dearth of mechanics and artisans, but the great army of them are not as skilful as is desirable. This is not their fault, nor that of employers, but of industrialism. In helping these to better things, the union believes it is subserving the interests of the individual, the craft and society, and that is why the union printers of the United States and Canada are spending approximately \$15,000 a year to advance the interests of supplemental trade education. It is admitted that exceptionally apt persons manage to achieve success under existing apprenticeship systems. But the world is not made up of exceptional people, and the industry would fail utterly if only the naturally fitted were to enroll among its followers. Therefore, trade educational schemes should be developed with the idea of aiding the average man, who seems to be an object of scorn in some quarters. But the union's commission believes that what helps him will result in the greatest good to society. It may be profitable to a few to have the land swarming with half-baked mechanics, but it is neither patriotic nor humane.